The Science of Collaborative Research

*Press Release*

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# UF Plant Biologist Honored As Distinguished Scientist

**Washington, DC –** SURA today announced that Pam Soltis, a distinguished professor and curator at the Florida Museum of Natural History at the University of Florida, will receive its 2018 SURA Distinguished Scientist Award.

The annual honor goes to a research scientist whose extraordinary work fulfills the SURA mission to "advance collaborative research and education" in the Southeast and nation. The award and its $5,000 honorarium will be presented to Dr. Soltis on April 26 at the SURA Board of Trustees meeting being held at the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility in Newport News, Virginia.

"Dr. Soltis is the kind of researcher every university hopes to have on its faculty. She is a renowned scholar cited in respected journals, an aggressive researcher winning multiple grants, and a passionate teacher impacting scores of students," said SURA Board of Trustees Chair Kelvin Droegemeier, who is also Vice President for Research at The University of Oklahoma.

A member of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Soltis studies plant diversity, with emphasis on the origin and evolution of flowering plants, plant genome evolution and conservation genetics. She uses genomic methods, natural history collections and computational modeling to understand patterns and processes of plant evolution and identify conservation priorities.

In nominating Soltis for the award, UF Vice President for Research David P. Norton wrote that her work in genetics and genomics was not only groundbreaking for plant scientists but for all scientists who want to understand the genetic relationships between populations and species.

"Dr. Soltis' research has dramatically changed our understanding of the natural world," Norton said. "Her work uncovers new relationships in the Tree of Life, illuminates fundamental aspects of plant biology, points to areas of greatest conservation concern and continually pushes the boundaries of what is possible in bioinformatics. In addition to being a world-class researcher, Dr. Soltis also shows a tremendous commitment to training and mentoring the next generation of scientists and engaging the minds and imagination of the public. UF is very fortunate to have such a leader."

Soltis has won numerous honors for her contributions to the study of plant diversity. Jointly with Doug Soltis, she received the Darwin-Wallace Medal from the Linnean Society of London, the R. Dahlgren International Prize in Botany, the Asa Gray Award from the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, the Botanical Society of America's Merit Award and the Stebbins Medal from the International Association of Plant Taxonomists. Thomson Reuters named her one of the World's Most Influential Scientific Minds in 2014. She also won the Botanical Society of America's Centennial Award.

Soltis earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Central College and a doctorate degree in botany from the University of Kansas. She joined UF in 2000, after serving on the faculty of Washington State University for 14 years.

She has published more than 400 peer-reviewed journal articles and oversees a diverse lab of more than a dozen graduate students and postdoctoral fellows and routinely trains at least five undergraduate students per semester. Soltis has received more than $37 million in support for her research on the evolutionary history and genomics of flowering plants. She was the lead investigator on the project that launched the new Genetic Resources Repository at the Florida Museum and is one of the principal investigators for iDigBio, a project that made UF the hub for the NSF-funded program to digitize the collections of all U.S. natural history museums. This led to a $27-million award that has brought widespread recognition to UF for its leadership role in bioinformatics. She is also a co-principal investigator of a $7-million Department of Energy project to pinpoint the genes that allow certain plants to fix nitrogen and engineer this genetic pathway into other plants for food and fuel.

"I am very honored to receive this award," Soltis said. "I have a fantastic group of collaborators at UF and elsewhere, and this award is for all of them as well. I'm also thankful for the supportive environment at UF, where collaboration is both valued and encouraged."

The SURA Distinguished Scientist Award was established in 2007, commemorating the organization's 25th Anniversary. SURA's Development & Relations Committee manages the solicitation, screening and selection of up to two recipients annually from a SURA member institution. Another scientist recognized this year by SURA will be Gabriela Gonzalez of the Louisiana State University. The president and trustee of each of SURA's 60 member research universities is eligible to make one nomination for the Distinguished Scientist Award.

The award and honorarium will be presented to Dr. Soltis at the SURA board meeting on April 26 to be held at Jefferson Lab, a U.S. Department of Energy nuclear physics lab. SURA serves as the majority and administrative member of Jefferson Science Associates, LLC – a joint venture with PAE – which is the DOE contractor for the facility, one of 10 DOE-owned national science laboratories.

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*The Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA) is a consortium of over 60 leading research institutions in the southern United States and the District of Columbia established in 1980 as a non-stock, nonprofit corporation. SURA serves as an entity through which colleges, universities, and other organizations may cooperate with one another, and with government and industry in acquiring, developing, and using laboratories and other research facilities and in furthering knowledge and the application of that knowledge in the physical, biological, and other natural sciences and engineering. For more information, visit www.sura.org.*